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SUBJECT: MEXICAN AMBASSADOR ON RELATIONS WITH ARGENTINA AND
THE MEX-ARG "STRATEGIC ASSOCIATION"

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a meeting July 13 with Ambassador, Mexican Ambassador to Argentina de la Garza Sandoval discussed President Kirchner's visit at the end of July to Mexico to sign an "Agreement of Strategic Association," which will group together under one instrument a number of existing bilateral political, commercial, cultural and science and technology agreements. Separately, Argentina's Planning Minister De Vido told Ambassador that President Kirchner is privately very impressed by President Calderon, and Deputy Foreign Minister Garcia Moritan said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sees excellent economic and strategic benefit in building closer cooperation with Mexico. Garcia Moritan said First Lady and presidential candidate Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner is a strong supporter of building closer ties to Mexico.

¶2. (SBU) Mexican Ambassador de la Garza said she felt U.S. engagement with Argentina was critical but recommended waiting until after the October presidential election for engaging on new initiatives. On MERCOSUR, she noted the problem with the economic "asymmetries" of the member countries, expressed Mexico's interest in increasing ties, but stressed that Mexico would likely never become a full member because MERCOSUR calls for integration beyond trade and commercial ties. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador and A/PolCouns on July 13 called on Mexican Ambassador to Argentina Maria Cristina de la Garza. De la Garza explained that the "Strategic Association Agreement" to be signed by Presidents Kirchner and Calderon during the former's official visit to Mexico July 30-31, is essentially an umbrella instrument under which the two countries will group the approximately 15 existing agreements covering various political, commercial, cultural and science and technology areas. Most importantly, de la Garza explained, the Association was a reflection of both parties' political will to strengthen and deepen bilateral relations.

¶4. (SBU) De la Garza noted that Mexico was culturally important in Argentina. Mexican art, literature and popular culture have long been popular in Argentina. During Argentina's military dictatorship, Mexico was home to the largest Argentine exile community. Today, the Mexican Embassy continues to promote youth and cultural interchanges.

¶5. (SBU) In a July 23 meeting with Planning Minister Julio De Vido, De Vido stressed to the Ambassador the importance of the bilateral commercial relationship with Mexico and that he

may travel with the Kirchners to Mexico. He stated that President Kirchner had met on several occasions with Mexican magnate Carlos Slim. De Vido also noted that Kirchner and President Calderon get along quite well, that the two had clicked when Calderon visited Argentina as President-elect. De Vido told the Ambassador that, at least due to this relationship, he expected the bilateral relationship to deepen. It was not this way, De Vido offered, with former President Fox.

¶16. (SBU) Separately Deputy Foreign Minister Roberto Garcia Moritan told the Ambassador that the MFA sees deepened relations with Mexico as beneficial economically and as helpfully broadening Argentina's strategic ties to other Latin American countries. He said Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner strongly supports this deepened relationship.

¶17. (SBU) In the conversation with Mexican Ambassador de la Garza, Ambassador noted that the Mexican-Argentine relationship was, in his view, important as it counteracted some of the sub-regional nationalism evident and provided some balance to Argentina's growing commercial dependence on Venezuela. De la Garza agreed and opined that she believed Argentina was seeking balance in its foreign relations. She also stated her belief that the U.S. and U.S. initiatives were important for Argentina but recommended we wait until after the October presidential elections before trying to engage on new initiatives.

¶18. (SBU) Responding to Ambassador's query about relations with MERCOSUR, de la Garza explained that Mexico was an Associate Member and very interested in increasing links to MERCOSUR, but stressed that Mexico would likely never become a full member. MERCOSUR's concept implies greater integration than Mexico could undertake due to its trade agreements with some 47 countries, including NAFTA. For many Argentines, she explained, they confuse the mechanisms of NAFTA with MERCOSUR's. MERCOSUR is a very different concept and this accounted for some the problems the group was experiencing in moving toward more integration, due to the "asymmetries" between the member states.

¶19. SBU Comment: De la Garza is a knowledgeable, engaged observer of Argentina, its domestic politics and its role in the region. And, the Mexicans enjoy a positive relationship with the GoA and Argentine society. Embassy will look for ways our two missions might be able to work together to advance common issues such as freer trade, strengthening institutions and promoting more north-south interchange.

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